



Running in the Shadows by **MulishaMaiden**

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Summary: Valerie Holland's life was flipped when her sister disappeared. Close to a year later, she is no closer to knowing the truth. Then, Billy Hargrove saunters into her life. He is just the danger she needs in her life to discover Barb's disappearance. She is the free, loving spirit with a hint of rebellion to keep him interested. How do they figure out the Stranger Things in Hawkins?

1. Chapter 1

Disclaimer: I do not own Stranger Things, it is owned by Netflix and the brilliant minds of the Duffer Brothers. I own; Valerie and her group of friends you will be introduced to.

I do hope you all enjoy this story, and the characters I have created. This will be mostly canon, but I will be veering away from it here and there. I do hope as we delve more into this story I am able to keep Billy in character.

Nothing was better than the crisp, fall air billowing around my body. The fresh smell of nature wafting through your nose was refreshing from the stale summer heat. The three best holidays were right around the corner, but celebrating them was not going to be easy. After all, my older sister Barbara went missing, and eventually the case went cold. When the Byers kid was found, my family's lost hope had been found. Then, it was extinguished again when the news reached us that Barbara was still missing.

I could not say I truly looked up to Barbara, but I did respect her. Our bond was strengthening, despite the fact we were polar opposites. Barbara was the quiet girl with a few friends who would rather stay in and study than party. I on the other hand, was always down for a party. I was not the most social person, but as long as Erica was my best friend, I had someone to drag around on my adventures.

The night Barbara went missing, her best friend Nancy Wheeler convinced her to go Steve Harrington's for a party. It was hard to not blame Nancy. I know she had absolutely nothing to do with her disappearance, but if Barbara had just stayed in that night, I would still have my sister. I had a looming suspicion that Nancy and Jonathon knew more than they were letting on about Barb, but I had no evidence to prove anything. This was another reason I could not stop the blame.

"Come on, Valerie, we've got to get back to my place soon," Erica called pulling my attention from my thoughts.

I picked up the pace to catch up with the raven haired girl, "Sorry, I

was in my head again."

Erica chuckled as we walked to the front door of our destination. It was the end of October, so we needed to find costumes. There was bound to be at least one student that would throw a Halloween bash. I was ready for the alcohol, pot, and deafening music. Sure it was not the healthiest way to cope, but it kept the thoughts at bay. Plus if I was too inebriated, I could not function enough to go out looking in the woods for something. Anything. Sifting through the already ransacked costumes, Erica and I were not finding anything we liked. All that was left were variants of the insanely cliché costumes.

"So, vampire, witch or vampire?" Erica asked sarcasm dripping thick as she shook her head.

I let a scoff out, "Well, if we had come last week like I suggested," Erica lightly shoved me cutting off my train of thought.

"Shut up, Holland," Erica laughed throwing a bag I barely caught in time. "I think this one will be better for you."

My eyes widened, "I didn't see this one there, and I checked," I was surprised by the black corset I held in my hands. It was a piece I was trying to find last year and could not. "You're the best! This is all I need. I already have the rest of the costume at home."

"Yeah, yeah you're finished. Now help me find mine," It did not take long to help Erica settle on her Go Go girl costume. White boots and all.

After purchasing the items, we walked out of the shop looking around at the few stores on Main Street. Hawkins was not the home of many stores. A few mom and pop shops lined downtown. Residents would make the hour drive to Terre Haute when they needed to make larger purchases. The local teens would go to find the trendiest clothes, and feel like they belonged somewhere other than Hawkins, Indiana.

Rubbing my hands together for a modicum of warmth, I looked to Erica while she cupped her hands over her mouth blowing into them. "Want to grab some coffee for the walk home?"

"Can't say no to that. Need something to keep my hands from freezing off." I rolled my eyes. Erica had flare for dramatics. It was only going to get colder once winter arrived.

We started walking to Tigers Coffee, named after the high school's mascot, but a fast approaching roar glued me to my spot out of curiosity. A dark, blue muscle car flew into the parking lot of Palace Arcade. A young, fiery haired girl jetted out of the passenger side door. My hazel eyes followed her all the way to the arcade, not recognizing the young girl at all. There was no way in hell I could forget hair that stood out from the sea of brown and blonde that flooded Hawkins.

"Holy hell," came a whisper from Erica, and I felt a jab in my ribs.

"Ow, what the hell, Erica?" I retorted seeing her point back in the direction of the mystery car.

I could feel my eyes widen when they fell on the boy that stood next to the car. A cigarette was hanging dangerously from his lips, messy curls falling around his face as he stared at the ground. He kicked at the loose rocks with his well worn boots not looking amused in the least.

Erica had not pulled her eyes from the gorgeous stranger, "It's a sin to be that attractive," I nodded next to her knowing I needed to avert my sight from him.

Dark eyes slowly landed on the two of us, and my face burned with embarrassment. Last thing I wanted was to be caught, but here we were looking desperate because we could not keep our eyes off of him. Suddenly he started walking our way, and my pulse quickened. Attracting him over was not on the agenda at all. He walked slow but with a purpose, much like a predator stalking their prey. Tight jeans clung to his legs, and a black shirt clung to his torso. A denim jacket covered his arms, hanging around his form.

I looked to Erica, her green eyes wide with nervousness, "Shit, Erica, he's coming over here."

"No shit, Sherlock," she whispered just as the captivating boy reached

us. A wicked smirk surfaced when he stopped in front of us. That same wickedness seemed to reflect in his stormy pools surrounded by thick, dark lashes.

He leaned onto the hood of the nearest car pulling a drag from the cigarette, "You two are a sight for sore eyes," he greeted running his tongue over his bottom lip.

The arrogance that oozed from him was unmistakable. He knew the effect he had on females, and knew how to use his sex appeal with the opposite sex. My friend was one of those girls that was putty in the hands of a pretty face.

"Just moved here," he extended a hand to Erica first giving her a wink, then reached out to me. "Billy Hargrove, and you ladies?"

Erica was quick to respond, "I'm Erica. My friend is Valerie."

"Hawkins may be a dump, but I can live with two of its most gorgeous residents welcoming me," he said slyly, stamping out the cigarette butt he threw on the ground.

I grabbed Erica, a tight grin on my face as I looked to Billy. I did not know him, and after Barbara's abduction, I was wary of everyone. "Sorry to cut the greet short, but we really need to be going," Erica turned her head swiftly towards me.

With a sigh, my companion nodded her head, "My parents are expecting us back soon."

A devilish smile formed on his sun kissed face, "Guess I'll be seeing you ladies around then," He gave a light tap to the hood of the black car, and sauntered back to his blue beauty. Leaning against his car, I could not help but to think how Billy looked like the perfect match to his car. It was as if he was carved from the Gods just to drive it. His sharp, rugged features complimented the sleek angles of the vehicle.

Finally turning away, we walked in the direction that would take us back to Erica's house. Searching my surroundings for anyone lingering, I grabbed the joint that I had rolled hiding in the side of my bra. What better way to pass the next twenty minutes than letting

your mind lift, and your entire body just ease into relaxation? It was the most welcomed feeling I could have. Unless I had to keep listening to Erica go on about our new alluring resident of Hawkins, Billy Hargrove.

"Jesus, Erica," I held in the drag as it burned slightly in the back of my throat. I extended my hand discreetly for Erica.

Erica laughed, "You're right, I need to stop," she resolved taking the offered herb. "My target is Danny," my friend gave me a sideways glance, "But you ma'am are still single as a pringle."

"I don't have time for dating," a plume of smoke followed.

Erica stopped abruptly turning to face me. She placed a gentle hand on my now tense shoulder, "Valerie, you have to stop," I dropped my head so my eyes met the asphalt we were standing on. "You can't keep going out there like you are. You aren't going to find anything the cops didn't already find."

"I know, but," I tried gathering my words before continuing, but took another long hit from the joint. "I need to find out what happened." The article released after Will was found alive had no mention of Barbara, and all about government experiments. There was no way they were not connected. I just had this inexplicable gut feeling that whatever happened to Will, also happened to Barbara. Joyce could not have been lying about her son. Right? The events were too close together, and the circumstances were similar.

"Stop going down that rabbit hole, Alice," Erica's soft voice pulled my eyes back to her. "It's been almost a year. If something new was there, you would have found it already. We have been out there at least once a week for almost a year now."

Erica began walking, so I followed suit. Halfway to Erica's house, I put out the joint, and stored it back into the small Ziploc to lock the smell in.

Almost a year, I thought to myself. Time flew, and it was not because I was having fun. I was in a constant haze between the booze and bud. I wanted to be. How could nothing new came up with my sister?

My parents did not share any information with me from this man they hired to investigate Barb's case. I was kept at arms length, and that infuriated me more than anything.

Monday was a drag. School was exactly the same. The same looks of pity and sympathy fell on me. The teachers tried to skirt around me, and honestly it was all annoying. So, I left at lunch. Mom and Dad were both working. I would have the house to myself, but I did not want to go home. I could go back to the woods. I shook my head at the thought. Erica was right, we would have found the tiniest shred of evidence by now. The rocks shot forward when I kicked them in frustration. I looked around before I started my trek home. The distance to any of the three lakes would take too long. I just wanted to crawl in my bed, and sleep the day away the more I thought about it. So, I walked home to the cold, empty house. *Maybe tomorrow will be better* was my last thought before I drifted into a deep sleep.

Tuesday morning came much too soon. I was not ready to face the day, but I had to make sure I did not skip an exceeding amount of days. The warm water from the shower sprayed over my head then my shoulders. The feeling was a relief to my stiff muscles. I threw on some black tights, and tattered, denim shorts over them after I clipped my bra around my body. Finally deciding on a shirt, I tucked in my favorite Doors shirt. I threw on my jacket and combat boots, and exited my room towards the kitchen. I looked around seeing no signs of parents besides the piece of toast sitting on a plate.

Snagging that and the banana next to it, I called out, "Thanks, Mom, I'll see you after practice!" slamming the door shut behind me not waiting for a response.

The jacket kept my upper body warm as the wind whipped around, and through the trees. The walk was not long, but just long enough to prepare myself for human interaction. Some days I could handle the stares of sympathy, but others, it was harder to keep the mask at bay. There was a handful of people who truly cared. Then, there were the ones who just wanted to talk for the scoop to have as the new gossip. Surprise! Jonathon Byers and I had been the center of gossip for what seemed to be an eternity. A gust of wind rushed through, so I pulled my black, cropped, leather jacket tighter to trap any warmth that was left. Hawkins High was clear in my sights now, and I was ready to get

out of this wind.

My parents gave me Barbara's car once it was clear that she was not coming back. I could not bring myself to drive it though. An uneasy chill came over my body anytime I was near it. Mom was adamant about me driving it, under the impression it would lessen my chances of abduction. The hard reality was, Barbara was abducted while walking to her car. It was not going to make a difference at all. But, I know the fear they held.

Erica and Laurie were standing next to the silver '81 Toyota Corolla when I entered the parking lot. Laurie's boyfriend Tommy had his arms wrapped around her, nuzzling his face into her teased, blond hair. Just as I approached my group, a rumble of an engine erupted. No one that attended Hawkins had a vehicle that sounded quite that dangerous. A familiar dark, blue, angular muscle car ripped into a parking spot with a screeching halt. All eyes were on Billy Hargrove as he climbed out of the car. He was dressed almost exactly the same, but a white shirt was under the denim jacket today.

Erica leaned over whispering, "That's Billy! From yesterday," the first bell rang cutting her off.

"I am well aware, Erica," I answered with a huff. I was not ready to listen to another spill about how glorious the new Mr. Hargrove was. "Now lets get to class." Turning away from my friends, I made my way to first period before the tardy rang.

Having Algebra two first period was the worst. It gave me an instant headache. I hated math with a burning passion. It was my worst subject, and I was constantly needing a tutor. Someone knocked on the classroom door disrupting my attention from the worksheet, and text book splayed across my desk. The door opened revealing the Vice Principal, Mr. Lloyd, with Billy Hargrove right next to the larger man.

"Mr. Andrews, this is Billy Hargrove, our new transfer," Mr. Lloyd announced then made his exit as swiftly as he had entered.

The math instructor looked around and pointed to the only empty desk in the classroom, "That's your seat, and this," he handed the

blank worksheet to Billy, "is the assignment for today. You missed the lecture, so partner with Ms. Dever if you did not go over this material yet in California."

Erica glanced back to me as Billy sauntered over to the seat next to my raven haired friend. Thank you Mr. Andrews for the inevitable ear bleeds during gym. For the rest of the class period, pencils scraping across paper, the occasional cough, and giggle were the only sounds made until the bell rang dismissing first period. The chairs screeched simultaneously as the students rushed out of as fast as they could. Erica was waiting by the door for me. Freedom was close.

"Ms. Holland, a word please?" came Mr. Andrews gravelly request. I winced knowing this was going to be about me skipping yesterday.

I stopped, and turned towards my teacher. A stern look set on his face as he peered through the large, bottle lens, "Yes, Mr. Andrews?"

He leaned his forearms against his podium, fingers interlacing, "Mrs. O'Neil informed me you were absent yesterday from all your classes after lunch. Care to explain?"

I was caught. Was there a way to get out of this? Who was I kidding? They have all been watching me as close as they can. Even when I try to keep a low profile, I still can not seem to achieve that.

I ran a frustrated hand over my face, and through my unruly waves, "Yes, I,"

"Sorry teach that was my fault," a gruff voice that seemed to have an intoxicating lilt to it came from the doorway. I looked over my shoulder to see the curled, light, brown mullet coming closer to view. His arm snaked over my shoulders. A sly smirk plastered over his shapely lips. "You see, she spent the rest of the day catching me up on the materials each class was going over," his brows knitted in confusion, and a finger tapping on his chin mocking his thought process. "Surely someone was supposed to tell her teachers she was assigned to tutor me for the afternoon."

I looked back to Mr. Andrews catching the twitch of his thick mustache, looking none too amused. Pinching the bridge of his nose

with squinched eyes, he let out an exasperated breath before his eyes met ours.

"Don't let me hear about anymore truancies Miss Holland," his stern glare delivered the message loud and clear. "Go before you're late to Economics."

With a small bow of acknowledgment, I scuttled into the hallway breaking the contact between Billy and I. I kept my head down focused on making it to my locker. The burn in my cheeks was inescapable as the humiliation washed over me. I approached my locker by slightly hitting my forehead against the cool metal.

"Well, well, Ms. Holland," I glanced to the left. Billy was once again in my eyesight, "looks like I saved the day," the smirk I was becoming familiar with lazily stretched over his mouth.

The tardy bell for second period was about to ring. I had to hurry before I was late, "Look," I met his cerulean pools, "I can not thank you enough. My ass was about to be ripped to shreds, but I have to go," I skirted around him books clutched in my arms. "See you around, Hargrove," I called out sparing him one last glance before I turned right down the hall.

A/N: Thank you lovlies for reading this chapter! I hope I was able to keep your attention to come back for chapter two. It was not much for a first chapter, but I just wanted to get a little back ground on Val, and the first meet with Billy covered. Next chapter will have a bit more drama.

2. Chapter 2

Disclaimer: Unfortunately I still do not own the rights to **Stranger Things**. It is still in the possession of Netflix, and the Duffer Brothers.

The shrill ring of the bell pierced the silence of French class signaling the students' liberation to make their way to the cafeteria. I can not remember the last time I ate lunch with my friends. The football field bleachers was where I spent the hour to myself. It was easy to sneak through the crowds, and keep out of the teachers' line of sight. The football field was behind the gym just down the hill. The bells could still be heard from here, so I always knew when I would need to make my way back to the main building. The sun was peeking through the clouds giving just enough warmth to take the chill out of the air. I sat down with my back pressed against one of the support beams. One leg stretched out, the other bent at the knee.

Fishing around my backpack for the hidden ziploc, I checked the vicinity one last time. The coast was clear as it always was at this time. I lit the white paper that surrounded the beautiful green herb stuffed inside, and took a long draw from it. I was taking full advantage of being completely alone. The baseball field was the usual area for students to escape the lunch craze because it was a fraction farther from the school.

"I don't think I'll be able to save you from the situation, doll."

I jumped at the unexpected voice twisting around to see Billy Hargrove propped against a pole, arms crossed over his chest, and a cigarette sticking from his mouth.

I shrugged lifting the joint to my lips, "The teachers never come down here, and no one else gives a shit," I noticed Billy staring at the flower in my hands. I motioned him over, "You going to sit, or stand there like some creep?"

A sneer crossed his sharp, curved lips as he pushed off the beam. He grabbed the joint out of my hand taking a puff before sitting down, "Now it looks like I'll have to be the one doing the saving," I smiled

taking the herb back from him.

A snicker left Billy, "I don't need any saving," smoke escaped his mouth as he spoke, "So tell me, Val," with a raised brow, I looked to him, "what is there to do in this hick town?"

I scoffed, "Nothing exciting. We wait for someone to throw a party, and we all drink ourselves into oblivion," I handed him the yellow flier Tina passed out earlier. "Like this one tomorrow night."

That arrogant smirk found its way back to his face, "Perfect way to show you townies the real way to party."

I stood up rolling my eyes, "Quite confident in yourself aren't you, Mr. Hargrove." The distant bell beckoned us to come back.

"I just know how to have a good time, Ms. Holland," he walked off not waiting for me to finish gathering my things.

I made sure to spray some perfume to mask any obvious odors before following after Billy. Only three classes left then it was time to make face as we hosted dinner for Nancy and Steve tonight. I was relieved to have some company during dinner tonight, but it had been at least six months since the last time Nancy and I had any contact. This would be my first interaction with the king of Hawkins High

I jumped when I heard the knock on the door knowing it would be Nancy and Steve on the other side. It still took me by surprise. People did not come for visits ever since the excitement of Barb's case died down. Anything was better than listening to Mom and Dad skirt around the findings of Mr. Bauman about Barbara.

Nancy gave a small, guilty smile, and Steve had a more positive lopsided grin. Feeling myself being pulled into warmth, I realized Nancy was the culprit of the pull. She wrapped her arms around me with a firm yet gentle touch. The hug was comforting, and I responded hugging her, too.

"I am so sorry I have not been around more," Nancy tore away still holding her hands on my arms. "I know I should have been here more to help you," Nancy radiated guilt, and it made me appreciate her

presence more.

"She was a sister to you, too, Nance. We all have to grieve," I smiled trying to let her know that her absence was forgiven. I led them into the house, "Jackets go here. Mom and Dad are in the dining room already."

Steve and Nancy sat opposite Mom and Dad. I sat at the end between Mom and Nancy, a bucket of KFC chicken in front of me.

"I'm so sorry I didn't get to cook," Mom poured herself a glass of water, "I was going to make that baked ziti you guys like so much, but I just forgot about the time, and before you know it, Oh my god, it's five o'clock." she chuckled almost like she was embarrassed she was serving fried chicken to her dinner guests.

It was entertaining watching Nancy and Steve stumble over their words of reassurance. An awkward silence fell over as we continued eating.

"So, I noticed a 'For Sale' sign out in your yard," Nancy broke the silence, "is that the neighbors', or"

Mom cut Nancy off, but once Nancy asked, I tuned them out. I tried ignoring the fact that our house was on the market. My parents listed it a month ago. They wanted to sell our house all for this loon to take Barb's case with no guarantee that he would find anything different than the police. No longer hungry, I picked at the potatoes on my plate.

"He was an investigative journalist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*," I heard my mom say to the two seniors.

Dad pulled out a card and passed it to Nancy, "He's pretty well known."

"Anyway, hes' freelance now, and he agreed to take the case."

Nancy and Steve stared at card before meeting my parent's eyes "That's, that's great," Steve was struggling to come up with words, "No, that's really, that's great right?" I could feel my brows involuntarily furrow as I watched him. Something was off.

"Um, what exactly does that mean?" Nancy asked confusion written all over face.

"Means he's gonna do what that lazy son of a bitch Jim Hop-" Dad started, his face turning red as the frustration came back to him. Mom laid a hand atop his hand to calm him. Dad cleared his throat, "Sorry," he apologized wiping his mouth, "What the Hawkins police haven't been capable of doing. Means we have a real detective on the case." Horse shit.

Mom grabbed mine and dad's hands, a look of relief washed over her, "It means we're going to find our Barb." I pulled my hand from my mother's. I did not share this hope with them. Not anymore.

"If anyone can find her, it's this man He already has leads. By god he's worth every last penny." Dad smiled at Nancy and Steve.

"Is that why you're selling the house?" Nancy asked.

Mom gave her a reassuring nod, "Don't worry about us, sweetie. We're fine. More than fine for the first time in a long time, we're hopeful."

I could not take anymore of the bullshit they were feeding Nancy and Steve. I slammed my chair back as I stood making my exit. I slammed the bathroom door closed behind me back sliding down the wall. The familiar tightening of my throat started as I muffled the cry trying to break past my hand.

A light knock came from the other side of the door, "It's Nancy. Please let me in, Vee?" she pleaded.

I stood from the ground, and wiped the tears that had fallen from my face. I stole a glance in the mirror seeing my already puffy, red eyes. There was no hiding that I was just crying. I opened the door for Nancy to walk in. She immediately drew me into her arms again.

"I had no idea they were selling the house. I'm so sorry, Valerie," Nancy stood back from me, now holding back her own tears, "I wish there was something I could do." She sat down on the toilet. "I wish I would have helped Barb that night, or found out sooner that

something happened." The look of remorse on Nancy's face was palpable. But, there was more than guilt she was trying to keep hidden. When Nancy lied, she kept her lips curled in just as she was doing right now. Her hands were fidgeting, and her body stiff.

I stood in front of her, curiosity getting the better of me. I had to know, "What do you know Nancy?"

Her mouth fell then shut, "Um...I don't know what you mean."

"You're keeping something from us," but Nancy abruptly stood, slightly pushing me from her path.

"I don't know anything, Valerie," Nancy declared leaving the bathroom and then my house entirely.

After tonight's dinner fiasco, I needed to get out. Feeding Nancy their false hope was an embarrassment. Especially after I saw that look that covered Nancy's face. I let my feet carry me to the Wheeler's front door.

"Valerie!" Mrs. Wheeler chirped in surprise not expecting to see me on the other side, "What can I help you with sweetie?" She opened the door the rest of the way letting enter their house.

"I was wondering if Nancy had gotten home yet from dinner?" Digging in my pockets I pulled out a pair of brown leather gloves, "She forgot these, and figured she would want them for school tomorrow." Mrs. Wheeler studied the gloves not recognizing them as Nancy's, but she could have got them when she went shopping with Stacy.

The older woman nodded moving from in front of me, "She's in her room. Has not been home long."

"Thank you Mrs. Wheeler!" but before I could take off, Mrs. Wheeler grabbed my hand. Her touch was warm, and comforting. Much like Nancy's hug had been earlier.

With a look of sympathy she asked, "How are you doing, Valerie? I haven't seen you since the memorial service," this is the one thing I hated the most.

I pulled my hand away as if I had been burned, "I'm holding up, thanks," and with that I ripped away up the stairs to Nancy's room. The shock on Nancy's face was almost comical when I came barging in with out any warning, "You are going to tell me what you know about Barb, and you're going to tell me now."

Mouth fallen open, Nancy stumbled over her words tears forming in her eyes, "I don't know, Valerie. I just know something else happened to her." She was not entirely lying. The brunette was not sure the exact nature of Barbara's death, but she was not going to involve her best friend's sister in the mess that was the Upside Down.

"You know more, Nancy. I can't force it out of you because torture isn't my thing," I chuckled, "But I'll find out one way or the other."

"You're safer the less you know," Nancy whispered looking into my hazel eyes with her own doe like, blue eyes.

Brows furrowed in concern, "What do you mean I'm safer?" Nancy averted her eyes back to the floor, "Damn it Nancy I deserve to know!" I yelled. How could I be safer not knowing the truth! The calm I was trying to portray on the outside was ebbing away. I could feel the animosity surfacing. My jaw clenched, hands curled at my sides.

A knock pulled me from the rage that was building inside. Mrs. Wheeler opened the door with a sheepish smile, "Everything ok in here girls?"

Nancy nodded quickly, "Yeah we are good. She's just angry about some girl at school trying to make moves on a friend's boyfriend," she explained trying to get her mother out of her room promptly.

"Ok, well I'll leave you two to your gossip then," with a small wave, Mrs. Wheeler exited the room, and my eyes were immediately on Nancy again.

Nancy let out a deep sigh hoping her mother heard absolutely nothing of their conversation, "Look," she met my scrutinizing glare, "it's not safe to talk about around anyone."

"Nancy," I almost growled, but did not speak further when Nancy threw a hand up to silence me. My fists clutched harder.

"I'm serious, Valerie. You deserve to know everything, and I will tell you. Just uh," Nancy paused grabbing her chin between her fingers, "let me get some things together, and we can meet somewhere private."

The seriousness and sincerity in Nancy's expression compelled me to calm down and believe her, "Fine have it your way, Nancy, but I will be back if you have not told me soon."

Nancy stood grabbing my arm before I could walk out of her door, "Promise you won't say anything to your parents or anyone," I was perplexed by the request, "At least, not yet anyways." The petite girl was stiff with pursed lips, a fire in her eyes I recognized when I looked in the mirror.

"I promise not to say a word," and I yanked my arm from Nancy's grasp.

Dejected, Nancy stared at her bare feet, "I will tell you soon,"

"Yes, you will, Nance," and I departed from her room. Mrs. Wheeler peeked around the kitchen watching as I left. I do not believe she one hundred percent bought Nancy's story, but it doesn't even matter. I am going to get my own answers. I did not need Murray Bauman.

Walking the twenty minutes back to my house near ten o'clock was nothing unusual, but tonight felt different. Maybe it was knowing I would be getting more information on what really happened to Barbara. The urgency of secrecy on Nancy's face sat heavy in my stomach. There was something more than just a simple disappearance that happened with Barbara. I kept looking into the darkness expecting to see something there, but there was nothing. I wanted to push Nancy into telling me everything tonight, but she seemed scared?

A distant rumble from an engine echoed through the quiet street, and it gave me small relief to know that some people were still out lifting the edge of unease I was feeling. The car revved closer, music blared

from the speakers. As it got closer I could easily make out Def Leppard's "Foolin" blasting from the speakers when the car came to a stop at the intersection of Elm and Maple, tires squealing from the force. The headlights gave just enough light that I could recognize the sleek features of Billy Hargrove's car. A head of curls popped out of the driver side window, a wicked smirk already painted on his smug face. The radio was silenced, and a whistle could be heard from Billy.

"Miss Holland, we really gotta stop meeting like this, "I walked from in front of his headlights, no longer wanted to be blinded by them. "Going somewhere?"

I let out an exasperated sigh, "Yeah. Home," I was ready to be in my bed. I wanted this day to be over. I did not have the patience to play games with the devilishly handsome Billy Hargrove.

"See you tomorrow doll!" He yelled before blasting his music, and tearing off the down street.

His sudden speed caused a blast of air to hit me causing my hat to fly off my head furthering my irritation. I was dreading school tomorrow. I did not want to lay eyes on Nancy, Steve, or Jonathon at all until Nancy told me whatever it is she was going to tell. All the lights were off in the house. I quietly entered the house, not wanting to alert my parents that I had not been in the house. I curled up on my bed, all the emotions from today finally pouring out of me as hot tears fell once again. I cried myself to sleep, nightmares of Barbara haunting me that night.

A little sad to see no reviews from the last chapter, but a HUGE thank you the ones that followed and favorited it! I hope y'all enjoyed this one. I know it was not much, but I'm just happy I got something out for y'all to read.

Next chapter will be Tina's party! I'm pretty excited for that one. Trying to keep Billy's and Val's friendship at a natural progression with the little bit of time the events of season 2 take place. Please review, and let me know what you all think!

3. Chapter 3

Disclaimer: I do not own the rights to Stranger Things. The wonderful creation belongs to Netflix and the Duffer Brothers.

I noticed I named Laurie's boyfriend Tommy, and that was complete accident. So no one confuses him Steve's former lackey Tommy H, I am going to rename him Derek.

I hope y'all enjoy this chapter! Sorry if there are any typos.

My heart was pounding, sweat soaked through my long shirt, and into my sheet. Disoriented, I looked around trying to find my bearings. The darkness I traveled through in my nightmares was never ending. I went through miles of dark forest screaming for Barbara finding her lifeless body in various location, cause of death different every time. I could not run away from it, and the faster I ran the more I heard Barbara calling for me. Eventually, her voice rang out blaming me. Asking me why I could not save her. Why I had not found her yet. Just the thought had tears welling up. Tina's party tonight could not come fast enough. I needed the endless alcohol to numb my mind. To take the sting of the pain away from me.

I took a quick shower, and dressed in a pair jeans, a black shirt that fell from one shoulder, and my Converse. I grabbed my leather jacket, and ran out of the door. I did not want to have a conversation with either of my parents this morning. They had been more forthcoming with Steve and Nancy than they had been with me. I felt a sliver of betrayal. Why did they not give me any details? I did not know this freelance journalist had any leads on Barbara.

When my eyes landed on my friends, I decided to slip past them. As endearing as they were, it was hard to be around them when I felt my world was crumbling down. I know that should be when I reach out to them, but I did not have the courage to do so. I did not want to show just how vulnerable I still was. Erica knew, hell she's the one that has been roaming the woods with me whenever I ask. I did not have that bond with the others.

I reached my locker without being seen, but I would have to face

Erica in second period because we sat next to each other in our Economics class. I grabbed all the supplies I needed for my first two classes, and trudged down the hallway to Algebra 2. I needed to keep a low profile with Mr. Andrews after yesterday's meeting. The leniency teachers gifted me was running thin as the time passed. Hawkins High's educators were expecting my attitude to even out, but I was far from evening out. Particularly now that I was just on the verge of getting closer solving Barb's mystery.

Slinking into my desk, Erica caught my gaze when she entered the threshold of the classroom. I gave a meek wave, and all she did was shake her head. I thought about how Erica could take things a smidge too personally. I was not avoiding her to be spiteful, and she knew this. But, she was the closest person I had, and everyone has their flaws. I kept my eyes trained on the blackboard, and my assignment not wanting to make eye contact with Erica.

As soon as the bell rang, I shot from my seat. By an act of some higher deity, I had been able to avoid Erica since I first stepped onto the school grounds. Keeping my head down, I made my way to my usual spot at the football field bleachers. I told Erica everything, and not being able to tell her I had a lead about Barb was hard. I did not trust myself to keep from saying anything, so I figured avoiding her would be best. Fumbling with the white stick trying to light it, I dropped it on the ground. My hands were shaking. Was I ready to find out the truth of Barbara if I was already this worked up? I could barely keep my composure, my anxiety was on a rampage today.

The joint was snatched up from the ground, and when I looked up, Billy Hargrove had it jutting between his lips as he lit up. It took a few pulls and the lighter flickering on and off before I could smell the strong aroma of the herb wafting from his form.

"What the hell has you so worked up today, Holland?" he inquired passing the blunt back to me, "You look like you're one scare away from death."

I snatched the white stick from his hand, my hands still shaking, "None of your concern, Hargrove."

His hands went up in mock surrender sitting down next to me, "Fine

done tell. Can't be that interesting anyways," he was baiting me. Not that he genuinely cared what was going on, just wanted to a reaction.

"You're right," the smoke following my words, "It's not interesting at all, but why do you keep me following me out here."

A scoff followed the question, "Don't flatter yourself," he grabbed the herb from me, "Free weed is good weed."

I could not argue with that, "Since you keep invading my private time, why the hell did you move from sunny Cali to dull Hawkins, Indiana?"

Billy's posture stiffened, he froze. Ocean blues turned stormy, and a snarl appeared. Now I wish I could have taken the question back. The move to Hawkins was visibly not a choice he was thrilled about. There was anger plain as day fighting its way to the surface, and I wanted to stop it. I knew that anger all too well. I placed a hand on his shoulder, but he shoved it off a feral gleam in his eyes.

I brought my hand to my lap, "Look, I didn't mean to bring up a sore subject. I get not wanting to speak of certain things."

A finger was pointed in my face as the words left my mouth, "You don't need to ask a fucking thing about me ok? We're not friends," and he stood from his spot storming away.

That did not go the way I thought it would. That raw anger wanting to rupture took me off guard. It was different than the few times he's lashed out at someone for minuscule accidents. I decided to catch up to him.

"You don't have to say anything else, Billy. Just know I am sorry." No other words were spoken, and we went our separate ways once we reached the hallway. Erica nor Billy shared another class with me for the rest of the day, and I don't know if I had ever been so relieved.

Erica was leaning on my locker when I rounded the corner. The back of her head rested on the door, and a bubble from her gum grew larger from her mouth. She looked utterly bored as she waited for me. I almost forgot she was going to walk home with me, so we could

prepare for Tina's party tonight. I had no way to escape now. Would I be able to keep silent about Nancy? I had to try at least.

"It's about damn time!" she exclaimed throwing her hands in the air, "What the hell took so long?"

I tucked some hair behind my ear then reached for the combination, "I got caught up talking to," I stopped myself before I told her who it was.

Billy had stopped me by the water fountain before I could turn the corner to my locker. His forearm rested on the space of the wall above his head, his lips curved with devilish glint in his pool of blues. He looked as if he belonged on the posters girls hung in their rooms. Beautiful, dangerous, and unobtainable. It was a complete one eighty from his mood earlier.

"Seeing you tonight at the party doll?" twirling a curl around his finger, I could feel the looks as people walked by us. Billy noticed where my attention had gone, and looked around himself. "Don't worry yourself with them."

I lightly slapped his hand away from me, "Your fans are glaring at me," I whispered catching Vicki Wallace's hard glare on me.

Billy laughed moving away from me, "Catch you tonight, Holland" he walked backwards for a moment, and then turned away. That was when I rushed away, and to my locker.

There was nothing to hide, so why am I acting like I am ashamed? Maybe I do not want to admit that his unexpected presence has been nice? A breath of fresh air. He was irrational and brash, and the air of pride was glaring. The way he would wander into the class, or talk to any female in the school. By no means was he ignored by the opposite sex. Two days, and he had the girls of Hawkins under a trance. But, he did not approach them. No Billy Hargrove waited for their invite.

I have seen approximately a dozen girls make advances on the newcomer the two days he has been here. The scene was always the same. Girl would walk up to him, giggle and flit around as they tried

keeping his bored gaze on them. Though he was disinterested, he still kept that heart dropping smirk on display. It makes sense now. I did not want to be seen as another one of the girls in Hawkins lining up for a chance with Billy Hargrove.

Shaking myself from the thoughts of his hardened, blue eyes, I looked to my best friend. Erica did not say anything to me. She only followed while I made my way through the crowd, and the doors of the school. Silence still hung in the air halfway to my house. Was Erica truly bothered by my avoidance? I probably would be if the roles were reversed.

A heavy breath of air fell from my lips, and I turned my head towards my friend, "I'm sorry, Erica," her blue eyes met mine, "Last night was rough, and I just didn't want to talk."

"Didn't keep you from talking to Hargrove," she muttered, "I saw the two of you walking back from the bleachers," my brows shifted in understanding. "I was going to check on you, but your new friend beat me to it."

I jogged to the front stopping her from going any further, "Seriously? He found me out there, and we smoked," I could feel my face contorting into an unknown expression, "Why would you let that bother you so much? It's nothing unusual for us to go without talking when I'm in a mood."

"Because I just wanted you to come to me about what's going on in that messed up head of yours," My eyes rolled involuntarily, and I gave her arm a friendly shove.

"You are such a greedy friend you know?" We both laughed at the ridiculousness of the situation.

She nodded her head still laughing, "I know I am, and I can live with that."

The sun had set, the screams and laughter of the children could be heard outside as the trick or treaters roamed the neighborhoods in their costumes for candy. I loved everything about Halloween; the costumes, candy, horror, and being able to be whoever you wanted

with no judgment for one night only. Erica and I were in proximity to Tina's. The music blared, cars and people littered the yard and street in front of the large place. Bodies writhed together dancing, there was a crowd chanting at the keg.

The keg stand, the way high school boys showed their dominance. Maybe I am missing the testosterone needed to understand why this is a rite of passage for high school boys, but I can not fathom why this is an impressive skill. Tommy H, Steve Harrington's old lacky, was currently showing off when we walked by to get into the decorated house. The house was crammed with what seemed to be every student that attended Hawkins High. Everyone was dressed in costumes, dancing, drinking, and yelling.

"Erica! Valerie!" we barely heard the voice call us from over the music. We spotted Laurie and Derek both dressed as vampires sitting on the couch drinks in hand.

Derek raised his cup in the air, "Hey she lives!"

I rolled my eyes with a small smile glad they did not seem upset with me at the moment, "Funny, Derek!" I laid a hand on Erica's shoulder to get her attention, "I'm going to get drinks for us," and I left my friends together to find any booze I could. Pushing through the growing crowd I finally reached the kitchen where I saw Nancy standing in front of the punch bowl.

"PURE FUEL PURE FUEL!" yelled the guy in the makeshift toga. Steve walked up to Nancy as she dunked a cup into the bowl. They exchanged words, and the look on Steve's face as I got to the punch bowl myself said he was not pleased with the way the conversation went. He looked annoyed yet concerned.

I stopped Nancy when she stormed away from Steve, and passed by me, "Nancy, you good?"

She wiped the red liquid that dripped onto her cheek from the cup, "Yeah I'm fine. Just letting loose for once," and she ripped her arm from my grasp dancing into the crowd.

I looked to Steve brow raised. He shrugged his shoulders leaning

against the counter. Still needing two drinks, I approached the punch bowl, and filled the two cups close to the brim. I took a large sip praying that the concoction was strong tonight. I was not disappointed.

"What's going on with Nancy? She seems wound up."

A frustrated groan followed by Steve running a hand through his tresses, "I would like to know, too," then he went in the direction Nancy had left.

I lifted the cup to my mouth drinking the rest of the red liquid it contained, and filled it up again. Turning, I bumped into someone's bare chest almost spilling the drinks I held.

"What the hell?" I looked up internally groaning seeing Billy's cocky face.

"Hello to you, too, doll," he placed his lit cigarette to his shapely lips inhaling smoke. I took another large sip hoping to feel a buzz soon. His chest glistened from the beer he had been chugging left and right. The way it gleamed under the low lit room distracted me for a moment. Billy's firm chest was on clear display right in front of my face. It was hard to look away from the work of art that was Billy Hargrove. I traced the expanse of skin down to the top of his jeans, then back to meet his deep, blue eyes. "See something you like, Stevie Nicks?" I caught him looking over my costume. The corset pushed my bust, enhancing the shape of my torso. I wore a black, bell sleeved lace dress with my combat boots. My auburn hair was teased with soft waves, and bangs framing my eyes.

And like that, I cleared my head of the tantalizing thoughts swirling around about the smug man standing before me, "I've got to get this back to Erica," completely ignoring his previous question. I did not want to play into his game, "So, I need you to clear the way," I gave him my most convincing smile, at least I hope it was. He plucked the hat from my head setting it atop his head.

"Lead the way," he gestured with his hand grabbing two more drinks before he began to walk behind me.

Erica's eyes were the size of saucers by when Billy and I reached my group of friends, "Uh...hey, Billy," her voice laced with confusion looking between the both of us, settling on the hat resting on Billy's hair.

His arm fell over my shoulders, the smell of alcohol and cigarettes was pungent on his skin. A hint of his cologne was noticeable. A finger began twisting a strand of hair around his finger. I was thoroughly perplexed by this whole situation. The seething anger I gained from him at lunch, and now he had completely switched gears and was now friendly. Affectionate even with hair twisting, and his arm over me. I looked up to his face, studying the drunken haze over his face. A lazy smile crossed over his lips, but his eyes were empty. Numb. I sympathized with him. The feeling of just existing was all too familiar.

A wave of "Oh's" and surprised gasps was heard around the living room over the loud music. Nancy and Steve were the center of the unexpected attention. The petite teen's white shirt was covered in the punch. Complete shock clear as day on both of their faces. The stare down lasted a few moments before Nancy took off towards the bathroom, Steve close on her tail.

"Looks like King Steve is losing his princess," Billy laughed, and I shoved his arm from me.

"You don't have to be such a dick," I defended Steve also following after Steve and Nancy.

I knocked on the door lightly calling both of their names, but heard "Bullshit" exclaimed multiple times. The minutes passed, but I waited. I had never seen Nancy drink before, and I was worried. Not because it was that out of character, but she drank more glasses than a first timer should. Soon, Steve stomped out of the bathroom slamming the door behind him. I knocked again, and opened the door. Nancy was sitting on the toilet wiping at her shirt, tears running down her face.

"Nancy, what's going on?" I kneeled in front of her grabbing one of her hands in mine trying to draw all of her attention on me. When her eyes found mine, the gate broke and tears streamed instantly from her darkened eyes.

"We killed Barb," she sobbed face falling into the palm of her hands.

My body froze, and my eyes widened. The thumping of my heart grew louder. Nancy's sobs muffled. We killed Barb? That could not be right. My heart was racing, throat tightening. Nancy, her best friend killed her?

"Nancy?" A quiet voice announced from the door. Jonathon Byers timid face peeked from behind the door, "Are, um, you two ok?"

"Jonathon!" another wave of sobs came from Nancy, "Barb is dead because of me. She," Nancy pointed to me, "doesn't have a sister because of me."

Fear. That was all I could read on Jonathon's face. He was afraid I found something out I was not supposed to. He knew the secret, too. The secret Nancy was to tell me soon. I was finding the secret out tonight. No more waiting.

"What the fuck is going on?" I all but screamed. The older girl sucked a breath of air in, holding back the whimper threatening to escape, "Nancy, I need answers."

"She's drunk, Valerie," Jonathon announced hoisting Nancy's inebriated form from the toilet, "Guilt. She feels she's the reason Barb is dead because she did not go home with her that night," I blocked Jonathon's path, "Seriously, Val. Not tonight." He squeezed his way by me before I could question him any further.

Tears threatened to fall from my eyes. Every time I feel I am close to getting any lead or information on Barbara, they disappear in the nick of time. Nancy, Steve, and now Jonathon knew more about my sister than I do, and it was pissing me off. The lies were good, but Nancy's warning the same look of fear that showed on both Nancy's and Jonathon's faces confirmed my suspicions that there was more to Barb's and Will's disappearance. Charging out of the bathroom and into the living room, I looked the area over for Erica, Derek or Laurie. I did not see any of them.

I caught a glimpse of a figure sauntering towards me. It was Billy, hands tucked in his tight pockets, "Your friends left. Needed to meet

some people out by the quarry."

I stole the cup in Billy's hand, not even examining it before I slung it back taking every last drop down my throat. It burned. He must have added more alcohol to it after pouring it for himself.

"Woah," he took the empty cup back expecting there to still be some remnants of his drink left. "Easy there," he grabbed a hold of my waist after I slightly stumbled, "Got it?" He helped me steady myself. I nodded and proceeded to grab a joint that I hid in the strap of my bra.

"I will be after this," I sat down on the nearest surface I could find. I guess I drank more than I thought. The world was slightly spinning while I puffed on my joint. This feeling was euphoric, and I did not want to leave it. The world around me felt like it was disappearing, and my body grew numb as the combination of the pot and alcohol took over. The feeling of my rolled herb slipping from my fingers caught me off guard, and I saw Billy taking it to his mouth.

"Come on, Holland, we are getting you out of here."

Then I felt myself being lifted in the air. Billy's arms rested under my knees and shoulders. Instinctively, I rested my hands on his shoulders for extra balance.

"I can walk, Billy."

He laughed sardonically, "Please, You can barely keep your head up. Just shut up, and tell me where you live."

I could feel the light bounce as Billy walked through the house. I waited until we were outside, and saw his car come into view before wriggling in his hold, "Let me down, Hargrove."

My back met the side of a car, not hard enough to hurt, but just enough to cause a slight sting. The door next to me opened. We were at Billy's car. I did not even notice in my state of mind.

"Get in," he growled keeping the door open for me until I crawled in, and he slammed the door shut. Billy swung himself behind the wheel turning the key to ignite the engine. The purring of his vehicle sent a

flurry of vibrations through my body. The rumble was intoxicating, and I ran a hand over the leather of the seat in between us.

"She's beautiful," I mumbled with a small grin on my face. I had never been in a car with such power and ferocity. It was exciting.

Billy ran a hand over the dash with a proud smile, "The best thing about my life," he tapped the dash before handing me the stolen joint. I took out my lighter firing up the tip again until smoke came from the the end. "Address?"

"3010 Elm Street," as soon as the words left my mouth, the car screeched as the tires began to turn suddenly.

The fresh air coming from the cracked window was a welcomed feeling. It did wonders for my wasted mind. I studied the interior of the blue car noticing "Camaro" printed on the glove box. The same smell of hairspray and cigarettes clung to the leather of the car, but the smell was still uniquely Billy's.

"Thanks for the ride home since my friends ditched me for a deal," I spoke up extinguishing the tiny roach that was left.

"The party was a drag. Needed an excuse to get hell out of there," he glanced at the watch on his wrist lighting up the face, "Fuck!" he slammed his palm against the steering wheel. The anger was from earlier today was slipping returning. "Just what I fucking needed!" He slammed the breaks spinning the Camaro around in the middle of the street. I held onto the safety bar above my head.

My heart pounded violently in my chest. I slapped his leather covered arm, "What the fuck is wrong with you? Are you trying to get us killed?" I yelled.

"I was supposed to pick up that stupid bitch at 10:30 in Loch Nora, but I was too busy saving your drunken ass!" the more he yelled, the harsher his tone became. It was unsettling. The alarming speed he was driving at made my stomach clench.

"Billy, please slow down," I begged. Fear bubbled inside me. Then, he finally slammed on his brakes at the entrance of the Loch Nora

neighborhood.

He turned in his seat pointing a finger in my face, "We wouldn't be in the situation if you could hold your fucking liquor."

"Screw you, Billy! I didn't ask you to swoop in like some knight in a suit of leather and ripped jeans," I yelled throwing the passenger door open. Billy grabbed my wrist pulling on my arm just enough to keep me from moving out of the car.

"Close the god damn door, Holland, and keep your ass in here, " I closed the door knowing I was in no state to walk home no matter how much I wanted to get away from this self centered prick, "I don't see Max anywhere." He gassed the accelerator heading back towards Elm street.

"I'm sure Max is fine," I wanted to give some kind of reassurance.

"For her sake, she better be," Billy growled coming to a stop at the curb of my house. The for sale sign staring at me outside of the window. My heart sank seeing the sign. Every time I saw it, it was a new slap of reality in my face.

I opened the door, and turned back around to look at Billy. Hands gripping the steering wheel hard enough to turn his knuckles white. The light from the top of the car just enough of a flow for me to notice the subtle twitch of jaw. Before thinking, I placed a hand on top of one of his. He still stared harshly through the windshield of the Chevrolet.

"For whatever reason you did this, thank you. I hope Max is ok," I let go, and stumbled my way out of the car, still not sober enough to maneuver as well as I usually do.

"Hold on," Billy got out of the car approaching me as I leaned against the door or the car. He wrapped an arm around my waist steadying me, and began walking me to my front door. "Got it from here?" He asked gruffly taking his arm from my body. I nodded grabbing the keys from the purse hanging on my shoulder. Nodding his head, he turned taking the few steps down to the sidewalk.

"Thanks again, Billy."

He threw a hand up giving a slight wave, "You owe me, Holland."

I waited until he peeled away from the curb of my house before entering the silence that was home. Tonight was nothing like I imagined it would be. One, I did not expect my three people to up and leave me just score a deal. Two, Billy Hargrove as my babysitter was hard to believe, but if I'm being honest with myself, I enjoyed having his attention. Three, I needed to know what made him turn into such an enraged being. There was no middle ground between calm and angry for Billy as far as I had seen. It only seemed to happen when a part of his home life was mentioned in any way. What could be so bad? Did I even want to know what truly happened behind closed door at the Hargrove residence? It was just another mystery to add on my list of mysteries to solve. But first, I would be talking to Nancy about tonight's bathroom episode.

A/N: So, what did you think? I know I'm teasing with Valerie learning about the Upside Down, but I want to make sure I get the timing just right, and want to keep it at the forefront of everyone's mind. Now that Billy and Val are becoming more familiar, I think it's time she sees a bit more of the true Billy. The angry Billy, and I hope I'm capturing that persona well.

A big thanks to; Dawn's Darkness, Cosmo 39, IsabellaAnne-Rogers, and vivelaine for their amazing reviews. Seriously thank you so much. Because of your kind words, I felt the extra motivation to get this chapter out.

4. Chapter 4

Some events and background about Billy and Max you do not recognize may have come from the Stranger Things novel: Mad Max Runaway. I recommend it to everyone who loves Max and Billy. Gives a pretty good insight in their home life, their past in California, and why they really moved to Hawkins.

Today was not going to be pleasant. My head pounded from the dehydration caused by last night's drinking. I kept my sunglasses on for as long as I could, but once I got to my locker I knew I had to put them away.

"You look like shit," I jumped at the unexpected voice. Hand on my chest, I turned finding Erica leaning against the locker to the left of me.

"What the hell, Erica?"

"Sorry, I didn't know you were so jumpy today," she followed me when I left my locker. I just needed to make it to third period, and I could sneak a nap in during study hall in the library. As we were getting closer to Mr. Andrews' class, I noticed Billy propped up on a locker.

"I'll catch up with you," I told Erica. She looked to me, and then saw Billy nodding.

She waved a hand with a roll of her eyes, "Whatever you say, Val," giggling, Erica left, and I made a step forward.

I tucked a piece of hair behind my ear getting ready to close the distance left between Billy and I. Finally noticing me, Billy locked eyes on me. A feeling of apprehension washed over me. I have never felt nervous around Billy before, so why now? Then, I remembered the alarming speed we were going in the Camaro last night. That was the same feeling that wrapped around every nerve in my body when our eyes found each other. I froze in my spot debating if I should continue, or abort and head to class. The decision was made for me when Vicki walked to Billy, sent a glare my way, and covered his lips

with hers.

A small sting stabbed my heart at the scene. Was I upset that Vicki had Billy coiled around her? *Valerie, it's been three days. Snap out of it,* I thought to myself, but still I could not shake that feeling of disappointment while I made my way to class. Algebra passed slowly. I tried to keep my focus on Mr. Andrews' lecture, but I could feel Billy's hard gaze every so often. It was distracting, and I was not sure what the lesson was about. My leg bounced trying to keep myself calm.

"Miss Holland, can I get your attention up here, and away from Mr. Hargrove please?" heat immediately rushed to my cheeks.

I could feel the glare I gave to the back of the balding man's head as snickers rang around the class room. This day was shaping to be worse than I expected. If the ground swallowed me whole, I would be satisfied. I could not get out of this room any faster when I heard the first ring of the bell. Once I saw Billy leave, I found Erica making her way to Economics.

"Hey," she greeted, "So, want to tell me what's going on with you and Billy?"

I shot her an incredulous look, "Nothing is going on between us. He had his tongue down Vicki's throat this morning."

"Oh," she pursed her lips, "That explains the go to hell look," my raven haired friend said taking her seat in Mr. Johnson's class. Economics ran smooth without the presence of Billy to keep my mind abuzz, and alert on his every move.

It was off to the Library after the dismissal of second period echoed through the school. Study Hall was my second favorite time of the day aside from lunch. I could complete homework from the night before, and start on the assignments from my first two classes. But, that was not on my agenda today. I needed sleep. My pounding head wanted, needed the break from my eyes being open. I found a table in the back away from Mrs. Larson's sight. She was preoccupied checking in the stack of books on her desk, and did not notice me walk by her. Even better. I sat my backpack on the chair next to me,

and not a moment later, Nancy Wheeler and Jonathon Byers sat at the table with me.

"H...hey guys?" This was out of the ordinary.

"I'm getting that information for you today, Val. Tomorrow meet me in Forest Hills Park at 9 a.m.," her face was unreadable. She had a slew of emotions rushing across her face. Nancy grabbed my hand in both of hers, her blue eyes growing serious and firm, "I promise you. You will know everything about Barbara and Hawkins Lab tomorrow. I can't keep this from you any longer."

I was taken aback by the intensity radiating from Nancy. I glanced over to Jonathon, and he sat there with his head down, hands in his pockets quiet as could be. I gained my composure knowing there was a measure of severity to this, "I'll be there Nancy, you can rest all your faith in that."

She nodded and stood from the chair, Jonathon following suit, "Nine o'clock," she repeated before exiting the library.

Hawkins Laboratory. My brain was in overdrive ever since Nancy told me they were involved with Barbara's disappearance. I raced to the nearest computer. Articles about a covert operation ran by the CIA came up on the search engine. Project MKUltra was designed to develop mind-control abilities to use during the cold war. It spoke of the abysmal horrors the subjects had gone through just for the government to fail with their experiments. So, what did the project and this Dr. Brenner that led the research have to do with Barbara?

Until I talked to Nancy, and had more of an idea what was going on with Hawkins Laboratory, I was avoiding Erica, Laurie, and Derek again for the time being. If this information really was as dangerous as Nancy made it seem, I could not let them get close to this. My nerves were thoroughly shot as I quickened my pace to get the field. I needed to take the edge off, so I could think clearly. It was difficult to stay here, and not chase after Jonathon and Nancy and not leave their side until they gave in and told me. The attempt would be futile. Nancy has gone three hundred fifty-eight days without telling me, she could hold on to the information a tad longer, and I knew it.

As soon as the rolled herb was lit, I let the smoke fill my lungs. Two more drags, and my body finally let go of the tension it was holding. The now expected crunching gravel filled my ears, and Billy stood there, white button up exposing the top of his chest. Just enough buttons undone to see the necklace resting there. His denim jacket hung open, the sleeves slightly rolled, showing off the belt buckled around his well fitted jeans.

"What can I help you with today, Hargrove?" I asked flatly. He shrugged sitting next to me lighting a cigarette.

"Well," he started running his moist tongue over his bottom lip. I could feel my eyes follow as his tongue darted over plump lip. I wanted to look elsewhere, but I was drawn to the action, "Your knight in leather and denim was thinking about cashing in that favor you owe."

"Don't you have a cheerleader to please?" I snapped taking a long drag from my almost forgotten joint. Did not realize we expect favors for being a decent human for a night.

A light snicker came from Billy. He shook his head before planting himself on one of the training mats stored below the bleachers, "Jealous it's not you?" a plume of smoke coming out with his words.

My body moved on its own will. I felt like I had no control as I scooted closer, and leaned in near his face. It had to be a mix of the haze my mind was in and the adrenaline coursing through my body to cause these actions. He smelt of hairspray, cigarettes, and a faint musky cologne. It worked for him, and the scent pulled me in. Blue eyes, darkened and narrowed taking me in.

"Do you want it to be?" I asked breathily. What was coming over me? Did I just want to tease and get a rise from him? I felt his hand creep into my hair by the nape of my neck.

"Only if you ask nicely," his breath hot on my ear as his voice grew huskier with each word spoken.

I was entranced by the storm in his eyes. My mind was telling me I needed to pull away, but I did not want to. I looked to his lips

wondering what they would feel like pressed to my neck. How his hands would feel against my legs. The temptation was there slapping me in the face. Lifting my hand to the side of his face, I trailed my fingers from his temple down to his strong jaw, but a hiss came from Billy at my actions. Using the fingers already on his jaw, I moved his head to the side, so I could get a better look at his face. Gently, I brushed the curls out of the way seeing a bruise forming on his strong jaw.

My face scrunched in confusion, "I don't remember you getting into a fight last night."

Billy jerked away from me, pushing my hands from his face as if my touch burned his skin, "Stray basketball this morning," he replied flatly clumsily lighting another cigarette.

I did not quite buy it between this reaction, and the Billy I witnessed last night. The wild, frantic Billy Hargrove. But, I was not going to push him on the matter. It would only further fuel the fire lit behind his eyes, and I did not want to be the one on the receiving end of that fury.

"Did Max make it home alright?" I asked placing the herb to my lips.

Frustration in his blue eyes he answered, "How about we not talk about that little bitch," the bitterness that tangled with every word made me flinch. What could a kid so young have done to make him so full of rage? But siblings have a way of getting under your skin in ways others can not.

"Alright, I get it. Sisters are pain in the ass."

"She's not my fucking sister," I fed the fire I was trying to avoid. I raised my hands in defeat, but Billy had already jumped off the mats madly inhaling on his cigarette to calm his nerves. "Just because you want to share details of your shitty life, doesn't mean I want to do the same," he stormed off from under the bleachers flicking out the cigarette.

His demeanor took a one eighty from being seductive to furious in less than a minute. Obviously talk of his home life was a sore subject.

Made me all the more curious, but I know how much I hated when everyone was pressing me on information about Barb, and our life without her. Even with this setback, I had a feeling Billy would be back.

With the distraction that was Billy gone, my mind started reeling with thoughts about Hawkins Lab and its experiments. I had nothing to go off of to form a single theory about what Nancy possibly had to tell me. I was restless. I smoked the full joint, usually only a quarter, to help me cope with the rest of the school day. It had the exact effect I wanted. The rest of school was a blur spent in a haze. By the time I was walking out of the doors, the high had almost worn off.

Mom and Dad turned in for the night, and I sat on my bed mind going a mile a minute. I wanted to get into that lab, and I wanted to do it now. Quickly dressing in jeans, boots, black long sleeved shirt, and my jacket, I snuck downstairs. Searching the kitchen, I found our flashlight and my keys then left. I do not know what I was going to do if I got in, or if I came in contact with anyone. I was a hasty decision, but I wanted to do something. Logically, I would wait to talk to Nancy and then research.

No water, no food, I had nothing besides a flashlight. How unprepared could I be? The walk to the lab would be just over a hour. Knowing the time, I still could not bring myself to drive Barb's car. I was nearing the gas station on Cornwallace, and I had a few bucks on me to at least grab trail mix and a water. When I reached the parking lot, I noticed a familiar blue Camaro parked at the front. Billy pushed out of the door, a case of beer in hand, and then stopped when he saw me.

"It's ten o'clock, doll. Shouldn't you be in bed?" He asked closing the distance to his car.

"Shouldn't you be getting your beauty sleep, princess?" Passing him, I entered the corner store, and heard the bell chime against behind me.

An arm came into view as it propped on the cooler door next to the one I currently had open to grab my drink, "So you do think I'm beautiful?" came Billy's cocky voice. I enjoyed the fact that Billy did follow me in the store. That I could draw his attention somehow to

me.

I shook my head placing the items on the counter at the register, "Never said that," I grabbed the bag and walked outside.

Billy, hot on my heels, grabbed my wrist turning me around to face him. There was a mischievous smirk forming on his lips, "Where are you headed this late at night?" I was walking backwards as he walked into me. My back met the car suddenly stopping my movements, and I was trapped between Billy Hargrove and the Camaro.

"I'm investigating the Hawkins lab tonight?" his brows furrowed at my answer. This was not the flirtatious answer he was expecting. He let go of my wrist, but did not say anything only looked at me like a I was growing a second head. "The lab had their hand in my sister's disappearance, and I'm getting answers."

Billy grumbled leading me to the other side of the car, and opening the door. His brows raised, and eyes widened when I gave him a questioning look. I sat down on the leather seat taking in the smell of the faint cologne and cigarettes that was signature to Billy. His door slammed when he pulled his leg into the car.

"Have you ever broken in somewhere before?" he turned to me with an expectant look in his eyes.

"No," I meekly answered looking down to my hands fidgeting with one another.

He huffed, "No," I looked back to him pursing my lips, "So, how do YOU expect to break into a government facility with a flashlight, water, and a bag of fucking nuts?"

"I don't fucking know!" I threw my hands up in exasperation. I was running off emotions, not logic.

With a roll of his eyes and a hand disheveling his mane he asked, "Where is this lab?" I was shocked by his question. He was going with me? Why? But I was frozen though, and could not ask those questions, "Val," he sang, "I can't leave unless you tell me."

The palm of my hand met my forehead, "Sorry, I wasn't expecting you

to just volunteer yourself to help me break in," the loud roar of the Camaro broke my babbling and reeled me back as Billy pulled out of the parking spot, "Take a left out of here, and right by the funeral home. Have you been to the quarry yet?"

"Vicki and I went out there last night," I scrunched my nose not wanting any to know any details of him and Vicki.

"Nice to know," I mumbled then seeing the victorious smirk, "We'll park there, and walk the rest of the way. Your car is too loud."

"Well," he took a hand off the steering wheel placing it on my thigh, "she's not the only thing I can make loud," he laughed when my face fell in shock. He squeezed my thigh before grabbing the wheel with it once again.

"Why are you helping me, Billy? Wouldn't you rather be sucking faces with Vicki?"

"Haven't had the opportunity to have this much fun since we left California," he answered his voice lowering losing the playful tone, "Plus the longer I can stay away from my shit hole house, the better." He pulled into the field shutting the lights and engine off.

I stood next to Billy at the trunk of his car, shivering in anticipation and cold nipping into my bones, "I may be reckless, Holland, but I'm not going to jail tonight," he turned to me eyes burning into mine, "If we can not get in, we meet back up tomorrow to finish the job. Do you understand?"

I nodded my head once, "Yes, I do. I don't want to put us at risk," Billy gave a firm nod grabbing the flashlight from my hand.

We started walking through the bit of trees to get to the railroad that ran straight to the laboratory. I walked closely beside Billy. My body was buzzing from the anxiety coursing through my body. There was no telling what we were going to find there. A small part of me hoped that we would not be able to get in there. Billy was right. I was completely unprepared mentally and in the department of supplies. But, I could not turn back now. I had to do this. For Barbara.

The tracks finally came into view, so now we did not have to concentrate as hard on where we were stepping. The air around us was eerie. The light rustle from the trees and our breathing was all I could hear. A crunch from our foot steps here and there made me jump. Heart racing, the pounding in my ears. At last, the lights from the lab came into view, and Billy held his hand up for me to stop.

"You see the fence?" I nodded when he looked to me, "We have no clue if anyone is patrolling this, so we need to stay alert," Billy turned the flashlight off, and got into a crouched position. I followed suit, and trekked behind him to the fence. "Look for any weaknesses, a way we can get through." I pushed along the bottom of the fence hoping that at least a part would give way, but nothing. "This isn't going to work," he remarked rubbing sweat from his forehead.

Just above a whisper I asked, "Why not?"

"If these people had something to do with your sister disappearing, you don't think they would make sure that their fence could keep people out?" Of course it would not be as easy as just sneaking through a hole in the fence. Unless,

"Unless we make our own hole?" I questioned more to myself than Billy.

"Bolt cutters," Billy started leading me the way back towards the tracks, "My dad has some in the garage."

I looked around hearing the leaves being shuffled around behind us, "Billy?" clutching to his jacket, we started walking faster.

"It's probably just a stray," he reassured, but the movements were quickening, and I turned to see a medium figure on all fours gaining on us.

"Fuck! Billy, go!" I screamed just as my feet began gaining speed running towards the car dodging the trees in my path. The snarling and screeching the animal made motivated me to keep going even though my legs burned and ached. The screeching hit a higher pitch, and the footsteps it created ceased. When I turned, the figure was writhing on the ground. Relief washed over me when we approached

the Camaro. We slammed our bodies into the vehicle. Billy wasted no time at all turning the engine, and accelerating instantly.

"What the fuck was that thing?" He yelled, panic in his raised voice.

"I...uh...I don't know. May...maybe a dog? A rabid dog?"

"Have you ever heard a fucking dog sound like that? Its head fucking split open, Valerie!"

I shook my head not having the ability to speak at the moment. I was still in shock as I held my hand on my chest. Still trying to process what happened myself, I could not give Billy any other answers. Billy pulled off the road into a lot of gravel. Throwing the gears into park, he looked out of the windows checking our surroundings.

"We don't have to go back," I whispered. The adrenaline of the chase still pumping, and the fear I felt trickling into my veins as I looked to Billy's uneasy eyes, "I might be getting all my answers, but I don't know," the crack of a can pulled my attention, and Billy proceeded to chug the beer he grabbed from the case in his backseat.

He tossed me one when he noticed me staring at the can on his lips. Anything to take my mind off of that. As much as I tried convincing myself the thing chasing us was a dog, I knew it was not. Its head split open, the unnatural way its body moved while it ran, and those god awful ear splitting screeches. It was otherworldly, and my mind did not know how to process the information.

"What do you mean answers?"

"I'm meeting someone in the morning who says they have answers about Barbara and this lab that apparently creates demon dogs," I could feel my body trembling. This was all too much. How does something like that exist? That creature was something from the movies, and your nightmares, but not real life.

Billy laid a hand gently on my cheek moving my face to look at him, "Talk to whoever it is with your answers, and come back to school. We will figure out what do from there."

"You're still willing to help me?" Billy nodded, "Why?"

"After seeing that...thing, I need to know what the fuck is going on in this hick town."

I could accept that answer. I was just as curious as to how creatures like that have been kept secret for so long in a place this small. What kind of experiments were taking place for this to happen. Hawkins was the town where nothing ever happened. Maybe a misdemeanor theft here and there, but government experiments, and the cover ups of missing children? This was something entirely different and bigger than I ever imagined.

AN: Hope you enjoyed this chapter! Val is so close to finding out the truth, and Billy is being strung along into it now. Sorry for the delay in updating, been a hectic weekend. I really hope to see more reviews from y'all. Would love to know what you're thinking, and even some constructive criticism.

Thank you so much Cosmo39 for the review last chapter!

5. Chapter 5

Disclaimer: I do not own the rights to Stranger Things. All material belongs to Netflix, the Duffer Brothers, and the author of "Runaway Max" Brenna Yovanoff.

The clock read 8:50 a.m., and I was pacing my room. Billy was supposed to be here at 8:45. He offered to drive me to the park after I told him I was walking there. But, truly he just wanted to be there to hear what Nancy said even though we agreed to meet at school after I finished with Nancy. I was nervous about meeting Nancy and Jonathon. About hearing the information they had on Barbara. Was I finally going to get closure? Maybe one of them could explain what the hell that dog was that was chasing us. Nancy called while I was gone, telling my mother that we were still meeting today about the very important information for our project on Barb.

I heard the vicious rumble of Billy's Camaro closing in on my driveway, and I ran down the stairs faster than I ever had. Mom and Dad thought I was at school when they left for work this morning. Slamming the door behind me, Billy honked before seeing me exit the house. I shot in once I opened the car door, and buckled my seat belt as Billy whipped out of the driveway. The semi-permanent scowl that graced his face was set when I glanced his way. Stopping at a Stop sign, Billy reached for his cigarettes, and lit one. He exhaled the first drag, and smoke filled the car before he took off again.

"Rough morning?" I asked when I noticed the darkening skin at the corner of his eye.

Billy shrugged, but the hardening scowl was noticeable, "You could say that."

The rest of the drive was only filled with Billy confirming the directions to the park. His music for once playing in the background at a medium volume instead of the head splitting octaves it usually is. Billy kept his window cracked letting the lingering smoke air out. The slight breeze it brought chilled my body more as it mixed with the shaking from my fretfulness. My body trembled more the closer we got.

"You going to make it, Holland?" he noticed me from the corner of his eyes when he took a quick glance.

"I um...", was completely out of sorts, I thought to myself, "I will be."

Billy made the left turn into the parking lot, and immediately I saw Jonathon's beat up, rusted car.

"That's Jonathon's car," I pointed to the vehicle, "They're still here."

Billy nodded and parked the car. I heard the engine die, but made no move to leave. Was I ready to hear the truth? I know I have asked myself that multiple times. Maybe I should continue living in the naivety that she was just kidnapped, but the seed about the lab was planted, and my curiosity was ever growing. Smoke filled the air again when Billy lit up another cigarette. I never noticed he finished the one before. Everything was running together since last night.

"It's now or never. No point in stalling," came Billy's smooth voice coaxing me to gain courage.

He was right though. I needed to go meet them. We were already fifteen minutes late. Letting out a deep breath I did not realize I was holding, I opened the door. Billy followed suit, and I felt a calming wave pass over me. The fact that I did not have to face this alone especially with the person that kept me alive last night just by being there. I gave a nod in his directed before I started walking towards the park. We reached the bridge that separated the parking lot from the park, and saw Nancy and Jonathon walking briskly in our direction. An older man in a black coat, suit, and glasses walking not far behind.

Nancy's worried, blue eyes met mine as she got closer, "Go now. We are being followed." I felt a hand around my wrist as the words fell off her tongue, and Billy guided me back to the Camaro, "I will tell you everything as soon as I can. I promise, Val," she called out while Billy opened the door almost pushing me in.

He did not waste a moment cranking the engine, and speeding out of the park. Billy and I both looked back at the same time to see several people surrounding Jonathon and Nancy in the light colored car. My

heart jumped, and it felt stuck in my throat. It was hard to breath. Short fast breaths was all I could manage to get out. Warm, calloused fingers grabbed my hand.

"Valerie, fucking breath before you pass out. Deep and slow," he instructed squeezing my hand reassuringly.

Deep and slow, I repeated to myself concentrating on the slow movements of Billy's thumb strumming across the top of my hand. My breathing evened out, and I leaned my head against the head rest. Billy pulled his hand away shifting gears as he started to slow down.

"What do we do now? Do we call the police? Do we..."

"We are not calling the cops," Billy interrupted, "These people work for the damn government. What are the cops gonna fucking do?" He was most likely right. This is the whole reason Nancy warned me about the dangers of knowing the truth. Now look where we were.

"They've got Jonathon and Nancy, and I've still got shit for answers. I have to go back to that lab tonight," I said with certainty.

Wide fear stricken blue eyes met my hazel ones, "Are you out of your god damn mind?"

"You were the one that said we would figure it out at school, but I don't think we are going back there?" I noticed a while ago we were headed in the opposite direction of the school.

Billy grabbed at his disheveled curls in frustration then hit the steering wheel with a sudden growl, "Fuck!" He stopped the car in front of a white house with white posts along the porch. "My dad and Susan are at work. We are going to lay low here, and get some shit we need until I have to get Max from school. Then," he paused, "then we come back for school shit, and we leave when it's dark."

"You sure it's going to be fine to have me over?" I did not want to add on to the home life that made him go into a fit of rage whenever I mentioned it.

"Honestly, Val, we've got bigger problems than my dickhead father, and what he thinks," he answered as he threw his door open. I stood

next to him when I climbed out.

I followed him as he went up the concrete steps to the front door. Billy fumbled with his keys. There was a bush with bright, red flowers to the right of the porch, and a potted plant in the upper, left corner on the porch. The door opened, and I looked away from the plants walking in behind Billy. Shedding the denim jacket from his shoulders, he threw it on the first chair revealing his sun kissed, toned arms. No one had a tan like that in Hawkins. California did Billy Hargrove wonders.

"You can walk and stare at me at the same time, Holland," Billy teasing voice broke my concentration of admiring.

He waved me into the dining room, and I realized I was still standing by the front door. I passed a shelf with a jar of sea shells at the entrance, as I walked further in I noticed a TV towards the window, a workbench, a sofa, and a recliner placed in the living room. The curtains were a bright floral print. Like they were trying to bring the California vibe with them. I reached the dining room and kitchen area seeing Billy rummaging through the fridge.

"You need to eat," he threw some lunch meat onto the counter and grabbed the loaf of bread. I sat at the dining table, and Billy joined me not long after placing a sandwich on a paper plate in front of me.

"Thanks." He only nodded after taking a large bite from his food. We did not speak until I finished eating. We welcomed the silence for as long as we could before the chaos we had discovered needed our attention. "So, what do we need?"

The tip of Billy's tongue rested between his dark, pink lips, "Bolt cutters, but other than that, not a fucking clue. Let's just go to the shed, and see," Pushing his chair back Billy turned around leading me through the back door.

We walked to the green building that was on our right. Billy opened the door, and turned on the light. Many moving boxes took up a majority of the space in the smaller building. Bigger tools hung on the left wall over a small work bench. I did not know what we needed as I looked around trying to inspire a modicum of an idea. I

could not see us needing a hammer, or a saw, but I did find a wooden bat in the corner. I picked it up lifting it to test the weight.

"This might be helpful if we come across the dogs," Billy looked up from one of the boxes, loathing shifted in his eyes as he caught the bat in his sights.

"Smash it to splinters on their heads," he seethed. I looked at the bat wondering what memories lies with it to have such a negative reaction.

"Not sure I'm strong enough for that, but I'll try."

Billy turned from me, and back to the box he was digging in earlier. I opened another box to keep looking for anything that could help us tonight. There were old T-Ball and basketball trophies with Billy's name on them.

"Are you going to join the Hawkins basketball team?" I asked knowing I was taking a chance at angering him with my question, but I could not help myself as I stared at the golden rewards hidden away.

"What?" He saw the trophies in the box as I set it on the floor, "No."

I shrugged grabbing another box to open, "Seems like you were pretty good."

"I was amazing, but it wasn't fun anymore after shit hit the fan, now drop it."

A loud clatter came from behind me. Billy stood there with a smirk holding a crowbar up, "Yeah this should do. What ya think, Holland?"

"No way those dogs could recover from that," Billy smirked a cigarette hanging from his mouth. He set the crowbar down on a shelf, and lit the rolled tobacco.

"I'm done in here, filled this box full of shit," he grabbed the box, we walked out of the shed, and to the Camaro at the front of the house. Billy set the box down to open the trunk, and placed it in there. Now we would not have to sneak this passed his dad and the woman he

referred to as Susan. Lifting his arm even to his stomach, he turned it over to see the face of his watch. "We've got about three hours to kill before I have to get my bitch of my sister."

"What's your deal with her? She's what thirteen? What did she do to you?" It hurt to hear him talk so disrespectfully of a girl who probably has no idea why he does not like her so much. I walked into his back focusing more on his answer than his actions when we entered the hallway off the living room. His body turned rigid, shoulders tense, his face drowning with animosity.

"That bitch and her father are the reasons we had to uproot our fucking lives from California, and move to this god damn shit hole! I had to leave everything that was my mom there. All because her friends are weak, and then she had to runaway," he slammed his fist into the wall, "Now I'm stuck with her watching her every move. I didn't ask or want a new god damn family this summer," I swore you could see the steam rising from his skin, he was heated.

I let out a heavy sigh figuring my next choice of words, He opened the door to what I would assume was his room. There was a Metallica poster on the wall straight ahead above his bed which was pressed against the wall. To the left was his closet, a poster of a scantily clad woman hanging there. A dresser was placed at the foot of his bed holding various hygiene products, and a mirror. There were various ash strays strewn around the room, clothes thrown haphazardly.

"Look Billy," I threw a shirt from the chair sitting close to the door. I looked to him gauging his body language and face, "Max isn't doing this to make your life hell. She doesn't understand what's going on herself."

"I agreed to help you, not let you be my fucking shrink, Holland. I don't give a fuck what her excuses are," he fell onto his bed, one leg bent as he laid on his back lighting a cigarette.

I knew there would be no talking him down, so I dropped it. I had to bear two more hours with him. I needed to keep the peace between him and I as much as I could.

"What exactly happened to *your* sister to go on this insane hunt?"

turning his head towards me, his topaz eyes were drained. Exhausted. Dark circles decorated the skin around his eyes.

I pulled my legs up, and rested my cheek against my jean clad knee. He may not owe me any explanations, but I somehow got him thrown into this shit, I might as well answer his questions.

"I owe you that much. Barbara went to Steve's party with Nancy..."

"Harrington?" he asked with a smirk.

"Yeah."

"Who knew King Steve knew how to have fun," Billy laughed lightly.

"Do you want to know or not?" I asked, and he gave a nod, "she left from Steve's before Nancy, and she never came home. This boy Will went missing two days before Barb. They were both alone at night near the woods. Too much a like for me to think it's not related since people don't go missing in Hawkins," I took a breather and saw Billy sit up on his bed from the corner of my eyes, "The day we find out Barb was missing, the boy's body was found, except it was not his body after all. His mom claims there was some government experiments, and I found information that correlates with her claims. I just want to know," tears were streaming down my cheeks as I finished.

Billy looked to me with sympathy. His lips pursed as he bit the corner of his mouth looking down to the floor, "We will get your answers one way or the other," he said with a conviction I was not expecting.

I stretched my legs, and lied down on the somewhat soft couch. Who knew exactly what has happened upon these cushions, but right now I could not care less if I caught a venereal disease from one of Billy's many conquests. My eyes had been threatening to shut since my body registered that I was no longer moving. Vicious, head splitting dogs tried mauling us last night. Government agents trying to take us into their custody today. My body and mentality could not take anymore right now. I needed the down time before Billy and I broke into a highly guarded government laboratory.

Parked in the school lot, Billy and I waited for the students to start filing out of the building. It was only a moment before the door opened, and bodies flooded out in a rush to start their weekend. That was my queue to get out now that I could blend, and a teacher could not spot me after skipping the day.

"Where are you going?" Billy asked with annoyance laced through his words as he stepped out of the car.

"Erica always has my homework and assignments when I miss school, so to keep the image with your parents, I'm getting them," seeing Erica and Laurie walk out of school together, I strolled over to the silver Corolla before Billy could say anything else.

It was strange watching everyone pass me by knowing they had not a clue in this world what was going on just a few miles away. They had no worries about if they would be able to infiltrate an unknown government entity, or if they would be mauled by the deformed dogs in the surrounding woods. Honestly, I wish I could take back what I have seen, and what I have learned about the LSD induced mind control by the CIA. But, if we made it through this without dying, I would have my closure, and could stop this investigation. Mom and Dad could fire Murray Bauman, and we could take our home off the market.

Erica and Laurie were getting closer to the car, and I saw Erica's eyes widen when they fell on me. She grabbed Laurie's arm dragging her faster to get over here. I could see the worry etched on both of my friends' faces. This was nothing unusual, why do they look like I did something terribly wrong?

Erica flung her arms around me, "Where the hell have you been?"

"Um...I just needed a day to myself," she released me from her tight hold.

"Your mom came here looking for you. We thought something happened. She has never come looking for you when you skip school. What's going on, Val?" It was Laurie's turn to question me now. But, why would mom come looking for me? There's no way she knew I was out of school, unless.

I grabbed Erica's shoulders in a panic looking around for any teachers. There were none in sight, "You can not tell mom you've seen me or heard from me."

"Valerie," I shook my head at Laurie.

"Not a word guys. Promise me, and I swear I will explain everything when it's all over," Their bewildered faces looked to one another before back to me, and nodded in agreement. There was a loud honk breaking our concentration. Looking towards the noise, I saw Billy waving me to hurry. "Shit. I got to go."

"What the hell does any of this have to do with Billy Hargrove?" Laurie asked, "I really don't think you should be going with him."

"I'm safer with him than you think. Homework?" Erica piled the few books and folder I needed in my arms, "Thanks. I'll talk to y'all soon. Just keep playing dumb," With that I ran to the soft rumbling Camaro. As soon as I shut the door Billy peeled out of the parking lot. "A little subtlety goes a long way, Hargrove."

"Who are you?" I turned seeing the fiery red head Max. Her bright, blue eyes were narrowed as she waited for an answer. I noticed the redness in and around her eyes as if she had been crying.

"Not your concern, shit head," I smacked his arm gently not approving at all of the way he spoke to Max, "What the fuck, Holland?"

"Would it kill you to be nice?" We glared at each other for a moment before he turned his attention back to the road, "I'm Valerie. Billy and I are helping each other with Math homework today."

Max looked from me to Billy then back to me, "Whatever you say, just be careful."

"What the hell does that mean, Max?" the hostility in his voice was concerning especially towards a thirteen year old.

"You know what I'm talking about."

"No, I don't think I do," his grip tightened on the steering wheel, "why

don't you enlighten me."

"Billy, drop it, and leave her alone," I interrupted wanting to divert his attention away from the younger girl.

She was clearly upset when I got in the car earlier no doubt from a different argument with Billy. The pure unadulterated rage he held towards her was something I could not get on a handle on. Billy pressed on the brakes hard in front of their house causing Max and I to lurch forwards in our seats. Billy slammed out of the car lighting a cigarette. His body rigid as he stood next to his Camaro.

"Get your shit, get inside, Max. Don't even think of reading those trash comics before your homework is done," he spat and I watched Max march inside the house with such defiance. Billy turned to me, eyes narrowed brows furrowed, "And you, stay the fuck out of my personal life."

A burning heat rose in me, "You're the one that brought me here! You're the one yelling at your sister..."

"She's not my god damn sister! Do you fucking listen to anything?" Throwing his cigarette down he stamped it out, harder than he would have if he were not wound up with this anger.

"I don't give a damn, Billy. She's still a human, and a kid. Where do you get off talking to her like she's shit."

He scoffed with a sneer stretched across his lips, "Lets just get inside, and start on this home work."

I wanted to leave. I did not want to be around Billy while he was in this state. Like a ticking time bomb ready to explode at any moment. What choice did I have though? He was the only person I could trust with the otherworldly matters at hand. He was the one with all the supplies I would need to break in, and I'm positive he would not just lend them out for me to go alone. With a deep sigh, I hesitantly followed Billy inside the house once again.

Billy and I had been sitting at the dining room table for a couple of hours now mapping out the entrances of the lab trying to figure out

our course of action. So far we knew we had to wait for a shift change, but we had to be fast. The only problem was we knew nothing about what the interior of the lab was like. Suddenly, I remembered what Erica told me at school earlier.

"I forgot to mention this earlier, but my mom came looking for me at school today."

"And?" Billy asked with a bored expression when he looked to me. His head resting in his hand while his elbow sat on the table top.

"And my mom never looks for me at school. After a year she has never known I skipped. So, how is it today after we saw those people take Nancy and Jonathon did she know I was not there."

Billy massaged at his eyebrows with his thumb and finger, "Because the fuckers I'm sure recognized you as the sister of the girl they got killed," the slamming of two doors brought Billy's eyes up, and wide as he quickly tucked the map away in my folder.

"Get your work out now," he said quietly, and the front door opened.

A deep booming voice called, "Max! Billy!" the voice did not sound friendly. Billy got out of the chair, his body stiff as he walked into the living room.

I could only assume that was Billy's father from the few comments Billy made about him. I could them talking, but could not make out what they were saying. Trying to focus on the work in front of me, I did not want to eaves drop on their conversation. Though I was most curious about the father figure in Billy's life. Footsteps echoed and when I looked up from my textbook, a man with neat, short brown hair about the same color as Billy's stood in the doorway. His eyes were flat, and his lips pursed under the mustache covering his lip. A sudden smile appeared on the older man's face, and he approached me with his hand extended.

"Hello, Valerie, I'm Billy's and Maxine's dad, Neil," Billy stood to the side of his dad rolling his eyes at the word 'dad.'

"Sorry to intrude," I took his hand, his grasp firm and unrelenting, but

he did not hold on for long, "Billy offered to help me with my homework. Math is my worst subject, and he said they were ahead in California." A scowl formed on Neil's face at the mention of California.

"I knew Billy could be an upstanding boy if he wanted to be," Neil turned to his son, his body blocking Billy from my vision, but I could see the man grab Billy's arm before mumbling something to him, and walking away. Billy watched after his dad a sullen look on his face, but once he could no longer hear Neil's footsteps, he sat down in his chair.

Placing a hand on Billy's shoulder, he jumped staring at me with wide, scared topaz eyes, "Billy, are you ok?" I was concerned. Seeing Billy's larger than life persona shrink down to nothing at just the door slam of the vehicle was unnerving.

He blinked as if to pull himself out of whatever daze he placed himself in, "Yeah I'm fine. Let's just get this over with, and get the hell out of this shit hole."

I nodded just as ready to leave. Neil did not put off pleasant vibes. I was uneasy as soon as I saw his cold, blue eyes analyzing me before plastering that fake smile on his face. It was the mask he more than likely showed to the public. A facade that he was a good man. A doting father when he was far from it. This was the same face Laurie's stepfather made. The same intimidating, calculating, dead eyes. It was the way he sucked the souls out of his children as he entered a room.

AN: A huge thanks to all that have followed, favorited, and reviewed this story so far. This has been my main coping mechanism since my mom passed, so seeing the response I have been getting truly means so much and keeps me getting words typed.

Shout out to Cosmo39 for another wonderful review, and to Opheilia Lake for your first review for me! Thank you again y'all are truly magnificent! Hope you enjoyed this chapter as much as I did writing it!

Bluejay (Guest) : Since I can't respond through a PM; thank you for the review! I am so glad you find the story interesting, and that I capture Billy's character well! I've been so nervous that I have not been doing his character justice because it is hard for me to capture his anger, and asshole ways. I hope you stick around for more!

I hope to see you all back for the next chapter. It's going to be a fun one!

6. Chapter 6

Disclaimer: No ownership to Stranger Things or the characters. I only own the OC's I have created. Please note I do not know the lay out of Hawkins Lab, or the exact security measures, just that Billy and Val need to get in. It may seem a little far fetched, but breaking into secret science labs is not in my list of things I know. I do hope y'all enjoy!

Billy slammed the trunk shut after we stuffed two backpacks full of random supplies from the box he stored in the Camaro this afternoon. The group of trees seemed more daunting than the night before. There was a larger threat out here tonight. We had to be more cautious in case the dog like creature was roaming about. I clutched the bat tightly ready to swing at any given notice. Our eyes met, panic met calm. But, as calm as Billy seemed to be, his shoulders were tense, and the clench in jaw did not go unnoticed. Without warning Billy began making his way to the treeline, and I took two large steps to be beside him. His crowbar clutched in one hand propped on his shoulder. I admired the way he carried himself. One of us had to have a collected head on their shoulders, and it was not me. My mind was in a frenzy. All the what if's of being caught, and what would and could happen to us. Every little scuffle in the leaves made me jump afraid the mutant had found us. Nothing ever came out as we reached the fence surrounding the lab. The distance between the fence and the building was about a quarter of a mile.

Billy looked down at his watch, "It's 6:57, most graveyard shifts start at seven," crouching the ground, he shrugged the backpack off, and grabbed the bolt cutters that stuck out the top of the bag.

"Will it be loud when you cut the fence?" I could see the guard from where we were.

"Not loud enough for that jackass to hear," he answered breaking the first piece of metal. I stood by checking every direction around us listening to clink of the metal as Billy broke more of the fence, "Alright I'm done." Just enough of the fence was cut for Billy and I to fit through, "You see that shed there?" he pointed to a smaller white building diagonal to the entrance, "I'm going to go and hide there.

When I signal you, then you're gonna do the same. That way we buy ourselves more time to sneak in during shift change."

This is insane! I thought as I watched Billy move stealthily through the shadows. The confidence I had of us successfully infiltrating the lab was waning. But, Billy waved to me from the small storage building, and I had to bury the negative thoughts to concentrate on getting there without being caught. My heart thrummed hard against my chest as I crawled through the hole in the fence. I took pause surveying the area. The guard stood with his back to us, and Billy was thrusting his arm to the right where the shadows laid heavily. Chill quivered through my body when my eyes rested on the darkness. The guard was turning, I had to act fast. Going against all caution my body was trying to give me, I ran as fast as I could in a crouch to the shadows. Goosebumps littered my body as I looked around the blackness. I did not waste a moment, as soon as the guard turned away I ran to the shed, to Billy.

"Why the fuck did you stop up there? You could have been spotted!" his words came out in a tense whisper. He was angry. Brows furrowed in frustration, nostrils flared, mouth tight, and jaw clenching.

"I'm sorry. I just froze. I felt wrong, but I made it, so," my hand rested onto his leather clad forearm to ensure I had his attention, "lets keep going."

Billy looked to my hand, back up to my face, and nodded before he looked around the edge of the shed, "Shit," both of his hands dragged down his face, "He never left post before the other guard took over."

There was only one thing we could do, "Then, when his back is turned we knock him out, and get in."

"Federal prison can't be the worst place to be I guess," Billy mumbled grabbing the crowbar he had laid on the ground, "We go together. Can't have you freezing up again."

Minutes passed as Billy watched for the new guard's pattern. We could not risk him catching us. It was dark for one, and he was armed with a military grade gun I'm sure. I secured the bag that was

hanging loosely from my back. I needed to be ready to run at a moments notice with Billy.

"Here's what we are going to do," Billy took my bat into his hand, "I'm going to sneak up behind him, and you're going to distract him. Tell him you're lost or something. Just keep his attention on you, so I can get a good hit in to knock him out."

"What do you expect me to do if I can't keep his attention? Flash him like it's Mardi Gras?"

Billy shrugged with a sly smile forming exposing his perfect teeth, "I mean, I wouldn't mind the show."

I slapped his chest lightly getting a laugh just loud enough for me to hear, "Shut up, Billy. Obviously I won't be doing *that*. I can improvise though." I said more to myself to keep what shred of confidence I still had intact. These are the plans you see in movies, and I was not comfortable with this. But, somehow I think this could work if I could keep in character.

"Alright, Holland. It's showtime," the look on Billy's face held a hint of excitement that even I could see with the small amount of light we had. He took off around the left of the shed, and I went to the right. The shed was not far from the door we were going to gain access through. The guard turned in my direction almost as soon as I exposed myself.

"Excuse me sir!" Waving to make sure I had his attention, I continued to get closer to the armed man, "I need some help!"

"Ma'am you should not be here this late at night. How did you even get in?"

"Oh, I was still in the building, but I can't remember which parking lot I was parked in. This place is really confusing," I was only half lying. The distance between the guard and I closed, and I could make out the name patched onto his uniform. The gun now hung around his back by the strap attached to the weapon. It was still unnerving being that close to him knowing he could take me out if we posed a threat. Where the hell was Billy? A loud grunt came from the man I

read as 'Fuller' and his body fell to the ground. Billy stood there, crowbar in hand, and a victorious smirk present.

"Well, that was easier than I thought," he bent over grabbing the hat from the unconscious man's head. I looked down to Fuller's body, and gave Billy a once over.

"His clothes won't fit you. He's got a good four inches on you, and definitely more built." Billy gave me a sideways glance. Throwing the hat on the ground, he then tossed the bat he had taken earlier to me, "Do you think we should bring these in? We'll look more suspicious."

"Christ, Holland, leave it out here then. I don't give a shit. I'm taking mine with me cause I don't know what the hell is running loose in there. I'm not going to be dinner for those mutated fucks."

The door opened quietly when Billy pushed against it with his body, crowbar tight in his grasp. It was eerily quiet in the hallway. Surely there were people within the building at all times. A whirring sound came from above, and I spotted a camera rotating to our direction. Grabbing Billy, I pulled him into the room immediately to our left to avoid being caught on the security footage. I locked the door to the dark room counting my lucky stars that it was abandoned.

"What are you doing?" Billy asked in a terse whisper.

"Cameras. We didn't even think about them having cameras. How is that something we missed?"

Billy shrugged and began to wander around the room, "Even if we did know about them, what would we have done about them? We have no clue where the security room is to disable them, so we are going to have to sneak around them anyways. Duck."

I headed his words ducking next to a table. Two mumbled voices could be heard on the other side of the door. The doorknob shook, and my hand instinctively covered my mouth to muffle the gasp that just escaped into my hand. The shaking ceased, voices spoke, and footsteps grew further from the door.

"You good, Val?" called Billy's voice. I nodded until I realized he

could not see me without any light.

"Uh...yeah. I'm fine. Just took me by surprise."

I saw Billy's figure stand by a shelving unit, and he started walking towards me. Crouching down in front of me, he brushed back a strand of hair that escaped my braid. With him so close to me, I could make out his face. The slight fear on his face mixed with the excitement dancing in his ocean eyes pulled me in like a magnet, and I found my arms wrapping around him. This was not the time or place, but I needed some semblance of comfort. I was more shocked when I felt an arm snake around my shoulders pulling me in. Sweat, cigarettes, and the fading cologne drifted around my senses. It was something I was becoming familiar with in the last few days of our adventures and encounters.

"We can leave if you don't want to continue," he whispered into my hair. I pulled away from him shaking my head. I was not abandoning our mission now. I had to know. For Barbara.

"I can keep going. I need to." Billy did not need to hear anything else as he stood extending his hand to me. I accepted, and he pulled me to my feet. I walked to the door to peek out the tiny window. As far as I could tell, the coast was clear, "We're clear. The camera is pointed away. We just need to watch for them, and I think we can get past them if we keep our backs against the wall their mounted on. Now it's just figuring out where the hell we are going to go."

"Taking charge now are we, Holland?" Billy pressed his body into my back, "I like it."

"No distractions, Billy. We need clear heads." I heard him sigh as he took a step away from me.

"Fine. Just trying to get something before we end up in prison."

His signature smirk masked the fear there earlier when I turned to him with narrowed eyes. Now was not the time for whatever this was that has been taking place between Billy and I whenever we were not in peril. Minutes had passed now, and I needed to check the hallways, what I could see, and the camera once more before I

opened the door.

"Search for any signs, plaques, whatever that might tell us what rooms are where."

I scanned the halls, but I did not see anything that would be helpful. Left, right, or straight? I looked at the cameras around us, and the one straight ahead of us was the only one that was not about to get our faces, so I grabbed Billy's wrist yanking him in my chosen direction. Peeking into the first room on the right, I could see a man in a lab coat hunched over a microscope. I motioned for Billy to crouch as I did. Getting passed the door, we stood, and pressed our back to the left to shimmy by the camera that was turning towards the entrance of the lab.

We managed to get to the end of the hall, and there was an open door with filing cabinets in the left hall. One look of our surroundings, and I made a shot straight for the door with Billy close behind. Quietly shutting the door behind us, I locked it and began looking around. Where do we even start. We could not be here long.

"How do you think they have these filed?" asked Billy, but I did not know how to answer him.

"Just start digging. Anything about Barbara is all I'm concerned about. If we find something, we leave. I think we've already pushed our luck so far."

There was a cabinet labeled by years, so I immediately looked in the cabinet labeled 'Jan 1983-Dec 1983.' I grabbed all the files from November to December. Surely the incidents concerning Will and Barbara were in here. I opened the November file to skim, but the startling whine of an alarm went off. Billy's eyes connected with mine, and I started shoving the files into my backpack.

"Fuck, we got to go," Billy now yanked on my hand, and blew through the door with no regards to security. We just needed to escape.

There were guards coming from the entrance where we had left Fuller's body. Billy pulled my arm as he started running down the

hall of the room we just left. No one was behind us when I looked behind us while we ran. The sight of us running had to look insane. Two teens carrying a bat and crowbar running through a building in jeans and leather. We looked like two kids who were up to no good rebelling against our parents.

An exit came in our sights when we turned the corner, and I am not sure if I have ever felt so relieved to see doors before. My lungs were burning as I tried to take in more oxygen. Legs getting stiffer with each step as blood pumped through my body. More footsteps, I heard just as we were closing in on our way out. To the left there were guards running towards us, and panic washed over me. I pushed Billy out of the door with the force of my body unintentionally. He almost lost of footing, but grounded himself. With a look to me and a nod our legs pulled us from where we stood. We were not far from where we breached the fence.

It seemed like Billy was gaining speed as the distance between us increased. But, really it was me slowing down. My body was ready to shut down. I was not used to physical activity to the extent it had tonight. Gym was the only exercise I got after I quit cheer leading. He must have noticed I had fallen behind because he slowed down, and looked back.

"Come on we are almost there."

"I don't know if I can, Billy, just keep going." I let out in between breaths. I was not getting oxygen to my body fast enough. Looking behind me I noticed how close the guards were getting, "Billy seriously. Go!" He growled in frustration running back to me, and grabbing my hand.

"I'm not leaving you here, Valerie."

With Billy holding onto me, I had no choice but to keep up with him. Before I knew it we made it to the fence. Pulling the loose piece of chain link up, Billy motioned for me to go first. I scrambled trying to get through as fast as I could, so Billy would have enough time to clear it. Once he came through the other side, we began the run again. This time during our trek through the forest, we could not use our flashlights. The lab employees would find us easily then, and it

made our journey through the trees troublesome. I could feel us starting to slow down, I could see his head looking in all directions. The grip his hand had on mine had not lessened during our faster pace, and it started to feel like his hand was tightening.

"Billy," I whispered as quietly as I could, "are you ok?"

"Listening for more than just human steps." I quietened instantly to keep my senses clear for sounds that haunted my dreams the night before.

As we neared the clearing of the trees, I could see nor hear any signs for guards or mutant dogs. Our steps quickened, but we did not break into a run. I am not sure either of us had the energy for another chase. I know I would not be able to out run anyone or thing at any point tonight. The beautiful, sleek Camaro danced into view, and a sigh of relief came deep from my lungs.

I slumped into the passenger seat, after throwing the bag and bat in the back seat, feeling the reverberations of the engine resonated through my body, and it was a powerful feeling being in this machine. I felt safe within these doors even if Billy drove like a bat out of hell. Tonight was no different as he peeled out of the gravel drive, and out onto the highway.

"Do you...uh...do you want me to take you home?" I turned to Billy unsure if it was safe for me to go home. What if there were agents at my house waiting for me? That would mean both of us were in trouble.

"I think they're waiting for me. They were already looking for me at school."

Billy gave a small nod then lighting his much needed cigarette. Taking a long pull from the stick, he exhaled and the smoke embraced me. I waved it from my face. It was one of the things I hated about cigarettes. The way it lingered. The smell of weed was strong no doubt, but the smoke dissipated quickly. What I would give for a J right now after tonight.

"I'm going to fucking regret this," he murmured under his breath, but

I was able to catch what he said, "Stay at my house tonight. It's easy to sneak into my room without waking my dad and Susan. Plus they will be leaving in the morning."

"I can't stay, Billy..."

"Where the hell are you going to go, Val?" he interrupted, but once again Billy Hargrove was right. I could not walk up to Laurie's or Erica's house without her parents calling mine, and I still could not tell them anything. I would be putting them at risk.

My hands raised in defeat, "Fine, I'll stay. I have nowhere else to go. I just don't want this getting you in trouble."

"And I'll deal with it."

The rest of the ride to the Hargrove residence off of Cherry was unusually quiet. I found myself rubbing my left hand missing the warmth Billy's slightly larger hands provided. Turning to him, I drank in his features. There was no denying Billy was attractive with his full, pink lips covering perfectly straightened teeth. Oh and that smile, not the familiar smirk, but his genuine smile was a sight to behold. Those topaz that I could drown in if I stared long enough. But his quick temper made him rough around the edges. I thought I was going to resist that charm, but it seems he was getting me deeper under his spell.

I tore my gaze from his form when I felt him slowing down. The rumble of his car quietened, and I was ninety-nine percent sure he was doing this to not disturb his slumbering parents. The engine was shut off, and he was out of the car quicker than I could get my seat belt unbuckled. I quickly followed after him to the window of his room. Shimmying the window up, Billy cupped his hands together, and positioned himself to be a step for me. I stepped into his hand, and felt him gently nudged my body closer to the window. Grabbing onto the inside of the ledge, I pulled my body in slowly with Billy guiding me from outside. Quietly, I landed on his bed, and sat there watching him pull himself inside the room.

The alarm clock on his nightstand read 10:08 p.m., but it felt much later. The aches from the exertion my body experienced were settling

in, and it did not feel the most pleasant. Billy laid on his back, arm lying across his eyes, and legs bent at the knees. His boots had not even come off yet. Not sure if he was asleep or not, I stretched out on my side with my head at the foot of the bed, and legs curled up in a loose fetal position.

A soft object connected with my head, and my eyes shot open followed by, "At least use a pillow," Billy took leaned over to take off his boots then laid back down tossing a part of the sheet over me. "You may have to hid in the morning, but it'll be fine," he grumbled turning off the side lamp. I tucked the pillow comfortably under my head thankful for the moment of comfort, and safety I felt at this moment.

"Thank you, Billy. For everything." My eyes were getting heavy. I could feel them fighting to stay awake. There was a pat on my knee, and then his hand stopped, but stayed in place.

"Yeah, you're welcome, Holland. Now sleep. I'm fucking exhausted from running around with your insane ass all day."

I chuckled lightly, but once my eyes closed I felt myself getting pulled into a deep sleep quickly. A soft snore from Billy was the last sound I remember hearing before drifting off completely.

A/N: Sorry for the almost two week late chapter guys! I was busy with my son's first birthday Saturday, and then just got into a real funk with not having my mom there for it. So, it's been a battle for a bit. But, I am pretty happy with the way this chapter came out, and I hope you are, too! To all that favorited and followed, y'all are some of the best thank you for the added support to this story!

Thank you to:

Guest: Thank you for your sweet review! I am trying my best to keep Billy in character. Thank you for ensuring me that I am keeping him to his character! I'm glad you are loving the story. It means so much to me that you took the time to send this. Hope to keep you around!

kate langdon: I know I already sent you a PM, but a big thanks again for your review! If for some reason you have not read her story *Crimson Wings*, do yourselves a favor, and read it. One of the best Billy stories you'll read!

Guest: That has been my intention the whole time. I want Billy to still be brash, and himself because of the trauma he has, and is still going through. The softer moments keep Valerie wanting to know more, and having her suspicions about his home life as well not just necessarily his dad because she doesn't know that it is him. More just wanting to know what makes him lash out the way he does. Thank you for the review, and I hope you continue to enjoy it!